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ABSTRACT

Two studies examined the relationship between teacher behavior and effective English teaching. The first study, in 1978, investigated whether a relationship exists between the intellectual disposition of English teachers and student response to literature using the Co (complexity) Scale of the Omnibus Personality Inventory (OPI) to measure teacher intellectual disposition and the Written Response to Literature test to assess student response. The findings suggest that teacher intellectual disposition will not interact with complexity in the students' performance, and that neither student intellectual disposition nor the individual teacher had an effect on student performance. In the second study involving a similar group, it was expected that if learning outcomes of students relate to high complexity teachers, then a trait such as tolerance to ambiguity and preference for complexity would relate to cognitive verbal reactions created by teachers in the classroom. Freshman English teachers were tested and ranked according to norms in the OPI manual. Teachers with the six highest and the six lowest scores on the Co Scale were identified, and classes of each teacher selected were observed by a trained observer for a period of four weeks. Cognitive verbal reactions were recorded. The study provided evidence that teachers with the highest scores on the Co Scale tended to move their students into higher levels of cognition and to find alternative methods of presenting information, and were more likely to provide positive reinforcement than low complexity teachers. (EL)

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Research-based Teacher Behaviors for Effective English Teaching

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In the February, 1985, issue of Research in the Teaching of English (Rosenblatt, 1985), Louise Rosenblatt differentiates the usages of transaction and interaction as reflections of differing paradigms. She was motivated to do so because of what she views as "a blurring of the distinctions between, on the one hand, transaction, transactional, and transactional theory and, on the other, information-processing, interactive processing, and interaction." (Rosenblatt, 97) Information-processing, interactive processing, and interaction are viewed as mechanistic, and, therefore, within the reading process, the text and the personality of the reader are seen as capable of separate analysis and the impact of one on the other as capable of individual scrutiny. From the transactional view of the reading event, however, context takes on a scope and importance "as a unique coming-together of a particular personality and a particular text at a particular time and place under particular circumstances." (Rosenblatt, 104) Thus Rosenblatt contrasts the mechanistic, behaviorist research model based on the concept of interaction from the organic model based on transaction.

The term context also is taking on considerable importance from the view of the educationalist as the term relates to the teaching-learning process. Webster's (1975) definition of context includes the following: "the interrelated conditions in which something exists or occurs." (Webster, 245) In a 1983 paper entitled "Context Effects in the Teaching-Learning Process," Soar and Soar use the term context to include clarification or modification of relationships between classroom process and pupil outcomes. They contend there are three points at which this occurs:

1. Identifying aspects of the process measure (classroom behavior) that have not usually been distinguished but which relate differently to pupil outcomes.

2. Taking account of pupil characteristics that change the relationship between process and outcome.

3. Identifying groupings of outcome measures that relate differently to a classroom behavior.

(Soar and Soar, 65)

Soar and Soar conclude their paper with the following summary statement: "It is clear that consideration of context variables will lead to different recommendations for best teaching practice than if context is not considered. However, this theme recurs: that the nature of the pupil and the nature of the outcome determine which classroom process is best." (Soar and Soar, 74)

Both Rosenblatt's transactional theory of reading and the educationalists' view of context as a clarification of relationships between classroom process and pupil outcomes have been important constructs in the research I and my colleagues have conducted in examining the relationship between teacher behaviors and effective English teaching. The concepts put forth by Rosenblatt were fundamental in an early study which was reported in the May, 1978, issue of Research in the Teaching of English (Peters and Blues, 1978). The purpose of this study was to investigate whether a significant relationship exists between the intellectual disposition of English teachers and student response to literature. Teacher intellectual disposition was measured by the Co Scale of the Omnibus Personality Inventory. This measure of perception called complexity is related to an open, creative approach to phenomena and is a measure of intellectual orientation; it relates to the specific trait of preference for complexity and tolerance for ambiguity.

To assess student response, the Written Response to Literature Test was developed by the researchers for the purpose of this study. The students were given unidentified passages of prose and verse for interpretation and comment. The essay-type responses were evaluated according to the categories of misinterpretation defined by I. A. Richards and which had a relationship to those qualities tested in teachers by the OPI Co Scale:

1. The misleading effect of erratic associations and sterotyped responses.

2. Distortion through sentimental or inhibited responses.

3. Confusion created by the doctrinal predispositions of the reader, especially when the reader's beliefs conflict with those presented in the poem.

4. The effect of general critical preconceptions and technical prejudgments.

Teachers and students participating in this study were a part of the freshman English program at the University of Kentucky, Lexington. From among the group of freshman English teachers who took the Co Scale of the OPI, those scoring in the upper one-third were placed in one group and those scoring in the lower one-third were placed in a second group. Teachers were randomly selected from each group to participate in the study. The main effect of Teacher Co OPI level on student Written Response to Literature Test scores was significant at the .03 level; this suggested that High Co OPI teachers did make a more positive contribution to student ability to interpret literature than did Low Co OPI teachers. Three other hypotheses tests were used to interpret the data. The findings from these tests suggested that the characteristic of teacher intellectual disposition measured by the Co Scale of the OPI will not interact with complexity Co in the student's intellectual disposition in performance of the Written Response to Literature Test (this was possible to test because all freshmen, at the time, were required to take the OPI for entrance into the University of Kentucky); that the characteristic of student intellectual disposition measured by the Co Scale of the OPI will have no effect on student performance on the Written Response to Literature Test; and that the specific effect of the individual teacher will have no effect on student performance on the Written Response to Literature Test.

In the December, 1984, issue of Research in the Teaching of English (Travers, 1984), there is an article entitled "The Poetry Teacher: Behavior and

Attitudes" in which a review of research on poetry in the classroom is summarized. In the section headed "What Is it that the Good Teacher Does?" The author includes a summary of our 1978 research but also reflects that researchers have not explored how exactly it is that successful teachers behave. One of the outcomes of the study reported in 1978 was the recognition of the need for further research into the characteristics attributed to high scorers and low scores on the Co Scale of the OPI through observation and evaluation in the classroom. This, it was felt, would lead to a better understanding of behaviors associated with effective and non-effective teachers. This recognition led to an extension of the previous research in a study which was reported in the November/December, 1982, issue of the Journal of Educational Research (Peters and Amburgey, 1982).

In the second study, our expectation was that if learning outcomes of students relate to high complexity teachers, then a trait such as tolerance to ambiguity and preference for complexity would relate to cognitive verbal reactions that the teacher creates in the classroom. Teachers and students from the freshman English program at the University of Kentucky, Lexington, again participated in the study. Freshman English teachers were tested and ranked according to norms in the OPI manual. Teachers with the six highest and the six lowest scores on the Co Scale were identified and classes of each teacher selected were observed by a trained observer for a period of four weeks. This four week period was divided into two weeks at the beginning of the semester and two weeks at the middle of the semester. Each of the classes observed was of the same time duration. No attempt was made to equalize verbal productivity across all classrooms since the observers were involved in recording natural discussions. The observation instrument used to code cognitive verbal reactions was Gordon Mork's Verbal Reaction Behavior Log.

The Verbal Reaction Behavior Log has three major categories: Cognitive, Skill and Affective, with three subcategories under each heading. Cognitive Level I consists of facts, terms, names, concepts, minor ideas, and associations; Cognitive Level II encompasses classifications, principles, generalizations, explanations, major ideas, and relationships; Cognitive Level II includes applications, problem solutions, extrapolations, and creative ideas. Skill Level I consists of directions and instructions; Skill Level II encompasses drill and repetitive practice and performance; Skill Level III includes altered or varied practice or performance. Affective Level I consists of personal involvement or identification; Affective Level II encompasses positively toned or supportive statements or reinforcements; Affective Level III includes negatively toned reinforcement or verbalization, sarcasm, anger, and punishment.

The VRBL is a frequency or tally instrument. Its basic unit is the sentence or sentence equivalent. Every time a new sentence is spoken, a tally is made in the proper blank.

The study included a finding of significance at each cognitive level in the main effect of the verbal reactions of the teacher characteristic, preference for complexity and tolerance to ambiguity. The study provided evidence that high complexity teachers move their students into higher levels of cognition which allows for challenges to student thinking. Students in the high complexity classrooms and students in the low complexity classrooms were receiving basic information early semester. Students in the low complexity classrooms continued receiving basic information even at middle semester; however, students in the high complexity classrooms moved on to the more complex cognitive levels at middle semester. In addition, high complexity teachers were found to search for and find alternative and varied mathods of presenting information and were more likely to provide more positive reinforcement than the low complexity teachers.

An analysis of the research reported in this paper suggests the following profile of behaviors which appear to be exhibited by high complexity teachers:

High Complexity Teacher Profile

Cognitive organization:

the teacher reflects a grasp of the subject matter

the teacher reflects a valid systematic structure of the subject matter

the teacher reflects an understanding of the concepts of the subject matter

the teacher reflects freedom from the textbook

the teacher reflects an understanding of perception and perception-modification

the teacher reflects a sound method for teaching concept attainment

the teacher makes possible situations for student development of insight into concepts of the subject matter

Creativity:

the teacher minimizes threats to learning

the teacher maximizes attractions to learning and personal growth

the teacher approaches the scheme of work in new and unusual ways

the teacher's plans opens fields for students through introduction of additional sources of information or of other facets for exploration

the teacher's plans involve the students

the teacher uses problem-solving situations and creates activities which cause students to consider alternative ways of thinking

the teacher allows students to exhibit many forms of expressions or output of ideas

the teacher makes it possible to be supportive of students

Acceptance:

the teacher's plans reflect faith in the students' ability to learn

the teacher's plans make it possible to treat students as persons without an attempt to control them

the teacher's plans make it possible to listen with understanding and to communicate this understanding of students' feelings, experiences, and thoughts

Openness:

the teacher seeks information from his students

the teacher's plans make it possible to receive and respond to information from students on the intrinsic merits of the information

the teacher's plans make it possible to perceive students' points of view and to express that perception.

In her article on the behavior and attitudes of the poetry teacher, Travers states:

> The notion that we should leave the poem to do its own work without the teacher's interference is not supported by the research, which suggests instead that the right teacher presence is essential. (Travers, 380)

The teacher behaviors suggested by the research shared in this paper are but a first, very tentative step toward defining what might comprise a "right teacher presence" for effective English teaching. Replication of this research is needed with teachers and with students in the public schools. With added research, we may be able to substantiate those variables that appear most powerful in identifying teacher behaviors which should become part of the classroom context for the teaching of English.

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